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Death, the Christian's Gain;

A

SERMON

DELIVERED IN

THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN DORCHESTER,

On Lord's Day, Nov. 5, 1854.

A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE

REV. BRADLEY MINER.

BY

S. F. SMITH, D. D.,

NEWTON.

BOSTON:
J. M. HEWES, PRINTER, 81 CORNHILL.
1854.

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Neponset, Nov. 10, 1854.

REV. S. F. SMITH, D. D.

DEAR SIR,

At a meeting of the Church in this place, we, the undersigned, were appointed a Committee to request a copy for the press of the discourse delivered by you on the morning of the fifth instant, it being the Sabbath following the death of our former Pastor, the Rev. BRADLEY MINER. Aside from the just tribute to the memory of both our lamented Pastors, a lasting benefit will, we think, be conferred on all who may be favored with its perusal.

We are,

Dear Sir,

Very respectfully

Yours,

JACOB BACON,
WILLIAM MARSHALL,
OTIS WRIGHT.

Newton, November 11th, 1854.

GENTLEMEN,

I cheerfully put into your hands the sermon preached by me at Neponset on the fifth of November. It is but trite to say that I had not expected that my effort would have been received with so great favor.

Possibly, though the discourse may lack intrinsic merit, it will be made acceptable by the true worth of the beloved brother, whose virtues it seeks to commemorate.

I am,

Gentlemen,

With great respect and Christian affection,

Yours in the service of the gospel,

S. F. SMITH.

MESSRS. JACOB BACON,
WILLIAM MARSHALL,
OTIS WRIGHT.

SERMON.

Phil. 1 : 21.

"TO DIE IS GAIN."

To the Christian it is gain to die. Though nature may shrink from the act of dying, that scene once passed through, "bright glories rush upon his sight." It is a short passage, and it may be a dark one. But to the Christian it is all light beyond. And, so far from desiring, "the dread path once trod," to return to this life, the Christian feels that he has come to the home on which his heart has been set, to the dear object of all his desires, to the society most congenial to his soul, and to the place which he has reason to prefer to all the universe besides. The presence-chamber of the King of kings, and the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, have charms for him beyond any earthly objects. And, at whatever expense they are enjoyed, it is gain to have come to them. He is with Christ, which is far better.

Let us contemplate a few of the points in which it is gain to the Christian to die.

1. It is gain to the Christian to die, because it brings him into a state in which he is free from sin, and made perfect in holiness. To be free from sin is the true Christian's chief desire. Though he takes pleasure in the various enjoyments which God has set before him in this life, and seems to other men to delight in them as much as they, still to be free from sin and to be made perfectly holy is an object which he holds infinitely dearer. And there is no enjoyment below the skies, which the true Christian would not willingly forego, for the possession of this. Sin is the source of all his trials. It is the sin still cleaving to him, and bringing him into bondage, which mars his religious enjoyment, awakens his doubts and fears, darkens his evidences, and causes him to grieve his divine Master, and to dishonor the cause of Christ. Assure him that he shall never sin again, and he will be the happiest of men.

Although the Christian in this world is often overcome by temptation, he is not so careless as some men may imagine. The word or act which has made the enemies of religion blaspheme may have caused him, you cannot tell how many hours of gloom and deep repentance, tears, and self-reproaches. It is sin, the remembrance that as long as he lives he will be more or less subject to sin, that leads him to say, "I would not live alway,"—as the poet expresses it—

> "I would not live alway, thus fettered by sin,
> Temptation without and corruption within."

In heaven, the Christian will be free from sin. No guilty act will mar the peaceful flow of his life. No sinful thought will interfere with his devout service of his divine Lord and Master. Sin can never enter there. It once entered, and the rebel angels were cast out of heaven. But it will never enter to cast a Christian out of heaven. For, first, the Christian is received into heaven and retained there, not on the ground of strict obedience to law, like the angels, but on the ground of sovereign grace. The angels, when they sinned, were put upon their probation. And, some of them, forsaking their allegiance, fell. The Christian, when he is received into heaven, will have finished his probation, no more to be tried again. And, secondly, Christ has given his direct promise, that from that blessed world his people shall go no more out. "So shall they be ever with the Lord." He shall make them "pillars" in the heavenly temple. As the pillars of the house do not remove out of their place, so the Christian shall not be removed out of heaven. Whatever amiable or sublime forms of character the best of men would have, if they were without any taint of sin, whatever sweet qualities would dwell in them, calling forth the admiration of every beholder, how much soever they would shine, as a palm of victory in the hand of Christ, or as a coronet of stars upon his brow, such traits and qualities will be in every Christian in heaven. So will they shine, and so will they glorify Christ.

What a change from a life polluted by sin to a life wherein is no sin; from a corruptible nature to a sinless nature; from a heart prone to go astray, to a heart in which such a tendency is wholly absent; from a state where holiness is imperfectly desired, to a state in which it is, and will be forever, fully enjoyed. The Christian who anticipates such things may well say, "To die is gain."

2. It is gain to the Christian to die because he will thus be free from doubt and fear as to his acceptance with God. Most Christians at times find difficulty in settling the question, "am I a child of God?" Few arrive at entire assurance. If, at times, they see grounds on the whole to hope—at other times, in view of other facts in their character and life, they are inclined to fear. Satan has many wiles, by which he seeks to lead men astray. His traps are laid at every turn. If he can deceive them into the belief that they are Christians, when they are not, his master-piece of deception is accomplished, and the poor soul which he has thus ensnared is, humanly speaking, safe within his domain. Blessed be God, that there is one, even then, who can deliver the bird out of the snare of the fowler. But, because the Christian is aware of Satan's devices, he looks with jealous eye, even upon his apparent evidences.

'Is my repentance mere remorse, or is it fear of punishment; or, is it that godly sorrow, which worketh

repentance unto life? Is my soul anchored on the Rock of Ages; or, have I rested on some false foundation? Are my evidences reliable; or, have I compassed myself about with sparks of my own kindling? Is my love of saints an increased development of the social instinct; or, do I love them for the Master's sake? Do I desire heaven simply as a scene of rest and joy; or, have its holy characteristics attracted my attention, and won my heart?' Thus, often, the true Christian, between hope and despair, is driven and tossed. God permits his children to live on, with this want of assurance, partly as a visitation of his rod, on account of their inconsistent lives; partly as an expedient to keep them near the cross, and to draw them back, as often as they begin to wander from it.

But in heaven, the Christian will be free from doubt and fear as to his acceptance with God. That he is there, in that blessed world, even if it were in the lowest seat, would settle that question. He *is* there, and safe; forever safe. Though he lived amid clouds and doubts on earth, there are no clouds there; but the full splendor of perfect assurance. "Doubt and terror are withdrawn." Should the old question that used to try him come up for a moment, "Am I a child of God?"—above, beneath, and on every side of him would break forth the means of solving it. A loving Saviour, God's unvailed and everlasting presence, the society of all the holy, and the strains of the new song of "redeeming grace and dying

love," poured forth and reëchoed from every quarter of heaven, would make him cry out, "yes, yes, yes. I *am* a child of God. I *am* admitted into his family, and shall never, never doubt again." O, could those diffident, yet humble and genuine Christians, who make "tears their bread and mingle their drink with weeping," but look forward a little into the glorious world, and see their future selves, thus singing and triumphing, doubtless they would exclaim with the apostle, "To die is gain."

It is but a little while, and the doubting Christian will come to all this. He will have his doubts resolved, his fears dispelled, his hopes assured, and he will never see a dark cloud pass across his serene sky again.

3. It is gain to the Christian to die, because he will thus escape from the losses, trials and temptations of this life. A Christian's life, like the life of all other men, has its trials. It is well that it does. Were it otherwise, we might become too strongly attached to earth, and too little desirous of heaven. Having every thing to our liking, we might forget God, and our dependence, and our obligations. We might perhaps fear that, like the rich man in the gospel, God designed to give us all our good things in this life, and reserved no portion for us in the world to come. Our grace would not thrive so much, were it not for the pruning-knife of affliction and the refiner's fire. A Christian without trials is in dan-

ger of becoming puffed up, proud, overbearing, consequential, self-confident, worldly, undevout. A tried Christian, to whom his trials are sanctified, will escape this ill leaven, and become the opposite—meek, humble, self-diffident, Christ-like, heavenly.

One of the trials which the Christian endures is in the temptations of Satan and the world which assail him. Another trial is in the unsatisfying state of his own heart. A third is in the woes that fall on the cause of religion. Besides these, a Christian is liable to many losses—losses of property, losses of cherished objects of expectation and desire, losses of friends by death. God sometimes strips his children of one object of desire after another, as if with a merciless hand, until it seems as if nothing were left to intervene between the soul and God. The pruning-knife cuts off branch after branch, till the stock is left bare. The rod is applied, till the spirit wavers, and is ready to ask, "Can these be the dispensations of a merciful God?" The refiner's fire waxes hotter and hotter around the crucible, till it seems doubtful, if the divine assayer has not forgotten the precious metal, to be purged and tested. But the divine assayer has not forgotten it. In heaven, the process having been rendered complete, the gem will be set in the everlasting crown. The star will shine resplendently from its celestial station. The darkness and the trials having passed away, the joy will begin.

Heaven will know no discipline, but that which is

remembered as among the merciful dispensations of the past. It will recognize no losses, except to restore to the arms of those that are in Christ, the friends who died in Christ, and were taken from them; and to recompense those losses by the more full and perfect enjoyment of Christ forever and ever. And the Christian who lived a life of trial on earth, whom every year weighed down with losses and crosses, and whose heart often shrunk from the touch of the almighty refiner, will no more know a loss or a trial again. The poor Christian will be rich there; rich in everything that could add to his comfort—rich in the love of Jesus Christ. Truly "to die is gain."

4. It is gain to the Christian to die, because he will be in a state of rest, and at the same time of devout employment. Rest is one of the most attractive things in our conception of heaven. In the scriptural descriptions of heaven, God has introduced that idea on account of its fitness to our condition in the present life. Many of those who have a "good hope through grace," are among the poor of this world, whose life is a life of hard toil and continual labor. True, in our day, he has called many rich persons also to himself, that they may be his stewards for disbursing his funds which he has committed to them, and that he may show that sovereign grace overlooks no class of human beings. But still, the larger proportion remains among those who are fatigued by the

toils of this life. The hard hand of the mechanic and the farmer is destined to hold the golden harps of heaven and the palms of victory. The sun-burnt brow is to wear the crown of righteousness. And it is to meet the conceptions of these, and of all who live in labor, anxiety, and perplexity, that heaven is described as a place of rest.

> "The weary find eternal rest,
> And all the sons of want are blest."

True it is, that heaven will give employment to all our faculties. We shall find use for all our affections and all our acquisitions there; but yet, in such a way as is not inconsistent with sacred rest. In this respect, what gain heaven will be in comparison with earth! Here, many of our cares and toils are of such a perplexing nature as to withdraw our minds from divine things. It is a little communion with God, and much with the world. There, the world will be stricken out of the list of things then present. Its labors, and its influences, and the pleasure it gave us, will belong only to the past. And the rest of heaven will be connected with constant and devout employment. No setting sun will shut the Sabbath. No needful labors will summon us, almost before the day is over. No wandering thoughts will spoil our worship and mar our devotion. We shall have no difficulty in realizing divine things. All will be clear, and certain, and real. We shall not seem to speak to a distant Saviour, but to one whom we shall see face to face.

"Forever his dear sacred name
Shall dwell upon our tongue;
And Jesus and salvation be
The close of every song."

The Christian's heaven will be full of employment, in which every part of a cultivated, refined and regenerate nature will come into play. What its various employments will be, we cannot tell. Worship of the Lamb that was slain will form a part. But how large a part, and what other employment will be joined with it, growing out from it, awakening it, and dovetailed into it, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard." That, we can safely entrust to our heavenly Father. But as to the reality of the rest, and of the divine employment, we are in a state to say this—"To die is gain." There may be an hour of pain, but after it, an eternity of joy and peace.

5. It is gain to the Christian to die, because he will thus be introduced into the presence of God and Christ. "In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures forever more." The presence of God drives away all evil, and secures the enjoyment of all good. He that has the presence of God will be shielded from all evil. He will be kept from all sin. No evil can approach the place where God is. It is "gain" to go from the world where God only reveals himself imperfectly, to the world where he shall commune with his people without any intervening vails, without interrup-

tion, and without doubts. If we take pleasure in the short and obstructed interviews which we enjoy with the King of saints on earth, how much "gain" will it be to enjoy an interview which no interruption can cut short, and no hindrance impede, and no doubts darken. If it is pleasant to have communion with Christ, where we have only the light of faith, how much more when we have sight—open vision!

> "Sure, 'tis a heaven worth dying for,
> To see a smiling God."

How appropriate are these thoughts when contemplated in reference to the new and solemn bereavement which this church has experienced in the death of our beloved brother Miner. He was absent from you, but closely identified with your history, as a church, as individuals, and as families. None lived here, but to hear of him or to know him. None knew him, but to respect and love him. To his unwearied perseverance and faithfulness you are indebted for the courage which led you to build this temple of God, yea, almost for the existence of the church itself.

Two years or more before this house was reared, his keen eye saw that a standard ought to be erected here for God and for truth; and, one week after seventeen persons had united together to form this church of Christ, he came, a leader and a helper of the feeble band. God blessed his endeavors to the conversion of sinners, and

poured out his Spirit, so that your borders were enlarged. So anxious was he for your advancement, that when you were too feeble to sustain the ministry, he labored as a school-teacher, that he might not be burdensome to any of you, while he was seeking your prosperity. He was unwearied in his labors, "publicly, and from house to house." Ever active, ever on the alert to do good, present wherever his presence seemed needed, like a brave and skilful general on the field of action, he was in himself a host. During the years of your feebleness, he remained with you; and when he saw the church established on a basis of permanence and prosperity, he was away to another field, that he might fulfil, by labor and perseverance, his Master's work.

He was in many respects the very opposite of his honored successor (Rev. Humphrey Richards,) as to intellectual qualities and mental peculiarities. But they were alike in the burning desire to promote the interests of the church, and the welfare of souls. Of both of them it might be said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." But their zeal developed itself in different ways. One was quiet, still, retiring, working unseen, but effectively; the other, stirring, active, cheerful, and full of hope. The one created a force underneath the surface, which wrought upwards and strongly; the other produced a wave in the society around him, visible on the surface, but reaching also to the depths. It has rarely fallen to the lot of a church

to have two such pastors, coming in succession, their united ministry covering the whole period of the existence of the church; both exercising so different, but so wide and so harmonious an influence; both producing so strong an impression on society; both making so broad and deep a mark; both leaving so fragrant a memory; both taken away at so short an interval, the one sowing, the other reaping, and now so soon ascended, that "the sower and the reaper may rejoice together."

The Rev. Bradley Miner was born in North Stonington, Connecticut, July 18, 1808. His attention was drawn to the importance of religious things when he was but thirteen years of age, and at that period he became hopefully pious, and united with the Baptist church in his native place.

Possessed naturally of strong powers of mind, and early led by the grace of God to choose the way of life, he commenced his ministry as a herald of the gospel at the early age of seventeen years. At a period when few young men think of being specially useful to the world, or scarcely of beginning to prepare for the great work of life, he had already girded on his armor, and was fighting the battles of his Lord. He arose, as it were, in the early morning, and took his sickle, and went forth among the reapers, the youngest of them all, but among the most efficient and laborious.

His earlier education was conducted in his native place; but at the age of sixteen years, he left his

father's house, for the purpose of enjoying higher advantages. After his hopeful conversion, he devoted four or five years to teaching and study combined, spending a few weeks at Newton and a longer period at the Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution. And it was the authorities of Madison University, who, at a subsequent period, in regular course, conferred upon him the degree of Master of Arts.

He was ordained in 1830, as pastor of the first Baptist Church in Fall River, Mass. After three years of successful labors, he removed to Pawtucket, R. I., where he remained a little more than one year, and then to Woonsocket, where he resided between two and three years. There, as before at Fall River, during his ministry, the sanctuary was enlarged and improved, and the church increased from nine members to about seventy.

Then came his longest, perhaps his happiest term of settlement, at Neponset. For about nine years he lived among you as your pastor, loving and beloved. The house of worship was enlarged, and the church grew from seventeen members to an hundred and thirty. In April 1846, he removed to Pittsfield, Mass., where his labors were attended as usual by the divine blessing. In four years he baptized ninety converts, and left the church numbering two hundred and fifteen members.

In 1850, he removed to the South Baptist church in Providence. The church, in connection with the fifth Baptist church in Providence, were soon engaged jointly

in building a sanctuary suited to accommodate them both, and to this enterprise Mr. Miner devoted much of the last three years of his life. No difficulties disheartened him. No trouble daunted him. His zeal knew only how to conquer. The enterprise on which he had set his heart was nearly consummated. But he, in the midst of his highest usefulness and fame, full of vigor, full of plans for his divine Master and his cause, has been snatched away by a sudden demise; called, not from the decrepitude of age, but from the full strength of manhood, to lay down his armor and put on his crown; a reaper, resting on his sheaves at noon. He was a successful laborer, and baptized during his entire ministry, nearly four hundred persons.

Six weeks ago to-day, he filled this pulpit, paying what you little deemed was a farewell visit to the scenes with which he had been so closely identified. He went around among your families, rejoicing in your prosperity, speaking to the little children and blessing them, and finally parting from you with the warm pressure of the hand of Christian love. And that pressure was the last.

Scarcely had he returned to his home, before he was laid upon the sick bed, from which he rose no more. His illness was short, though severe; but he bore it with Christian resignation, not an impatient word once escaping his lips. He remarked that if his sickness might be the means of honoring God more, he was content. A few hours before he died, he spoke of his unwavering

reliance on the "precious promises;" and those promises, no doubt, sustained him in passing through the dark valley.

During his sickness, every thing seemed to him "right." He said that he had nothing to fear. "It is a broad and sure foundation upon which I rest." "Through Christ, I believe that I shall triumph." He bowed to the mysterious dispensation that was removing him from his toil, submissively repeating again and again, "He doeth all things well." On Saturday morning, the day of his death, he desired to speak to a member of his family; but the powers of speech had failed him. He attempted to write the thought he would communicate; but the writing was illegible. Perhaps it was a word of consolation; perhaps, of exhortation to the ungodly; perhaps, an assurance of his peace in God; perhaps, a final testimony to his Master. He was apparently conscious of the presence of his friends through the day; and, at a quarter before six in the evening, he fell asleep, to wake to a more glorious Sabbath than ours; more glorious, because eternal.

His last sermon to his own congregation was on the first Sabbath in October; and it was remarked by some of his hearers, that they never heard him preach before with such unction and power. He died at the age of forty-six, after a ministry of about twenty-eight years. By an agreeable coincidence, the Rev. Mr. Field, who preached at the funeral of Mr. Miner, at Providence,

took for his text the same words which had been chosen, eight weeks before, by Rev. Mr. Bosworth, at Rowley, at the funeral of Mr. Richards; "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

Devout men carried him to his burial to his native place. It was evening when the last sad rites were performed. The funeral hymn was sung—

"Unveil thy bosom, faithful tomb,
Take this new treasure to thy trust;
And give these sacred relics room,
To slumber in the silent dust."

And after a fervent and affecting prayer, under the pale light of the moon, our brother was laid to his rest.

For several years, he was Corresponding Secretary of the Rhode Island State Temperance Society, and, by his powerful reports and addresses on that subject, he rendered himself highly useful in the cause. When he was pastor of the church at Pittsfield, the church were encouraged by his energy and efficiency to erect one of the finest edifices in the state for the worship of God, and he left the people in a high state of prosperity. In two or three weeks more, he was expecting to enter at least the vestry of his new church at Providence with his people, to preach to them "the glad tidings of the grace of God." The building stands, and the people

will enter it; but the pastor has entered "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

While he was the minister of this church, he preached a sermon of great merit before the Boston Baptist Association, entitled, "Preaching to the Conscience," which was afterwards printed, and will serve as a lasting memorial of his idea of preaching, a specimen of his own manner, and a legacy to his ministering brethren. "By it, he being dead, yet speaketh." The little volume containing this discourse embraces also, in a part of the edition, a sermon on the death of a youthful parishioner, and will now be cherished by you with double reverence and affection. In his preaching, he was faithful, affectionate and earnest, often not only quoting the word of God, but adorning his style with gems of sacred poetry, that by attracting, he might persuade; that by winning, he might conquer. As an example of his pointed method, some of you will remember with solemn interest, how at an evening service a year or two since, having remarked that a single sentence, easy to be remembered, is often more useful and impressive than an extended discourse, he added, "I leave this question with you—'*Where will you spend eternity?*'"

He lived here among you, an example of the truth he preached. When he met with trial, you saw how he bore his affliction; and when he was prosperous, you saw his gratitude to God for prosperity. In the same house, your two pastors lost the companions of their

youth. From under the same roof, their wives ascended to heaven. And, in the ripeness of manhood and usefulness, your two pastors, at an interval of just eight weeks, have gone to their reward, the reaper to welcome the sower, and "the sower and the reaper to rejoice together."

Brethren, you have one less on earth to be interested in you and to pray for you; but the "chief Shepherd" still survives. You have one more witness to the truth of religion, and one more representative in heaven. There is one more destitute church on earth; but one more harp and crown among the glorified. Your two leaders have gone before you; both your pastors, not lost by apostasy and excision, but welcomed among the glorified, where still they beckon you upwards. May you walk in their steps, that they may bring you all before the Judge on the day of reckoning, with unspeakable joy, exclaiming, "Here, Lord, am I, and the children whom thou hast given me;" and so may you and they "be ever with the Lord."

(Feb., 1891, 20,000)

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